

# 2020

## Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing Regulations & Information Pamphlet



Jonathan Eiden proudly displays the 171.0 pound, 85.5 inch lake sturgeon that he harvested from Lake Winnebago on February 9, 2019. Jonathan's fish was the largest fish registered during the 2019 spearing season.

Spearing enthusiasts interested in receiving daily updates during the 2020 spearing season, as well as other Winnebago System fisheries updates can subscribe through the following link:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/sturgeon/SturgeonLakeWinnebago.html>



## *Dear Winnebago Sturgeon Spearer,*

As the calendar turns to 2020 the focus for myself, and many others, turns to the upcoming sturgeon spearing season. The 2020 season commences on February 8, which is the earliest start date possible. Hopefully we will experience some cold weather in January to firm up ice conditions and provide spearers with safe travel conditions. The biggest factor that will affect the season is water clarity. We've been caught up in a pattern of dirty water over the past few years, but hopefully the 2020 season will have clear water to buck that trend.

The 2019 spearing season was heavily affected by water clarity. Water clarity was quite variable throughout Lake Winnebago with much clearer water along the north shore and much dirtier water down south. The clearer water up north resulted in the northern registration stations of Stockbridge Harbor and Waverly Beach registering the most fish.

There were a total of 479 lake sturgeon harvested from Lake Winnebago and 307 fish harvested from the Upriver Lakes during the 2019 spearing season. The trend of big fish continued with 32 fish (18 from Lake Winnebago and 14 from the Upriver Lakes) registered that were 100 pounds or larger. The largest fish of the season was registered on opening day by Jonathan Eiden. Jonathan registered his 171.0 pound (85.5") sturgeon at Wendt's on February 9, but the lore of this fish reaches far beyond being the largest fish harvested during the 2019 spearing season. This fish was previously handled by DNR fisheries staff during two prior spawning stock assessments. The fish was first handled below the Shawano Paper Mill Dam in 2004. At that time the fish measured 84" long. She was recaptured below the Shawano Paper Mill Dam in 2012, but this time she was measured at 87.5". This particular fish is the longest fish ever handled by DNR staff during our spawning stock assessment. We estimated that pre-spawn this fish would have weighed roughly 240 pounds in 2012. The difference between the weight then and the 171.0 pounds in 2019 is largely due to variable fish condition resulting from gizzard shad recruitment. Lake sturgeon harvested during the 2010-2013 seasons were in extremely good condition (plumpness) resulting from boom year classes of gizzard shad in 2009, 2010 and 2012. Gizzard shad are a fatty forage fish that can be very abundant. Thus, fish really fatten up during years of high shad abundance. The shad status was quite different coming into the 2019 spearing season. There were consecutive year classes with virtually no shad recruitment and only one strong year class observed between 2013-2018. I can confidently say that the weight of this fish would have been drastically higher had she been harvested during a season with high shad abundance.

Many spearers have expressed concern over the poor shad recruitment observed in recent years. At this point I'm not overly concerned. It's unknown exactly when gizzard shad came into the Winnebago System, but the first years of high shad abundance were observed in the late 1980s. This means that lake sturgeon historically relied on other sources of forage for most of their existence. Within the Winnebago System, this alternative prey source has been Chironomid (lake fly) larvae. The DNR has been intermittently monitoring trends in Chironomid abundance on Lake Winnebago since the 1960s. Chironomid abundance has been extremely variable throughout the years, but Chironomid abundance was high coming into the 2019 spearing season. This observation was confirmed through our diet analysis where most of the stomachs collected during the 2019 season were loaded with Chironomid larvae. So despite the down year class of gizzard shad, sturgeon were readily finding adequate forage.

Most spearers understand the relationship between certain prey sources and fish distribution. Chironomid larvae are typically more abundant along the eastern, central, and northern portions of Lake Winnebago whereas gizzard shad are typically more abundant in southern areas of the lake. The 2019 season strongly favored the northern stations as that area had the best water clarity and fish were feeding heavily on Chironomid larvae. The DNR collects data to monitor trends in shad and Chironomid relative abundance. Data from 2018 and 2019 sampling were similar with very low catch rates of gizzard shad, but high catch rates for Chironomid larvae. I fully expect sturgeon to be keying in on Chironomid larvae again during the 2020 season.

Good luck during the upcoming spearing season and I hope to see you out on the ice!

*Ryan Koenigs*

Winnebago Sturgeon Biologist



DNR Fisheries staff Scott Bunde (left), Adam Nickel, Ryan Koenigs, and Dave Bartz (right) with one of the largest fish handled during the 2019 spawning stock assessment. This fish measured 81.9 inches.



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Matt Leitner of Chilton registered this 79.2 inch, 126.2 pound lake sturgeon at Stockbridge Harbor on February 11, 2019.

## WINNEBAGO SYSTEM STURGEON SPEARING REGULATIONS

*To report violations call: 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367)*

*or cell #367*

### **Important things to know for the 2020 spearing season**

#### **Tags, Licenses and Permits**

- **SPEARERS MUST POSSESS A PAPER COPY OF THEIR STURGEON SPEARING CARCASS TAG AT ALL TIMES WHILE SPEARING**, a receipt of purchase, driver's license, or Go Wild card do not meet this requirement.
- It is **ILLEGAL** to possess more than one copy of a carcass tag.
- Carcass tags **MUST BE** validated immediately upon harvest by removing the validation stub.
- There is mandatory in-person registration of all harvested fish. Fish must be presented at a registration station by 2 PM of the same day the fish is harvested.

#### **Tagging Your Sturgeon:**

**When to validate:** Validate tag immediately after harvest.

**How to validate:** Remove the validation stub of the carcass tag below the dotted line.

**When to attach tag:** *If you leave it, tag it!* You may not leave the carcass unless the validated carcass tag is attached.

**How to attach tag:** Secure the tag to the sturgeon with a fastener

**How to protect tag:** It is the responsibility of the spearer to keep the tag protected and legible. Consider enclosing the tag in a sealed plastic bag.

**Register the Sturgeon!** It's mandatory to register your sturgeon at an official sturgeon registration station (see map on page 6). Call in or online registration is **NOT** available for registering harvested lake sturgeon.

## 2020 OPEN SEASON – Winnebago System Sturgeon Spearing

### Lake Winnebago

February 8, 2020 through February 23, 2020 on Lake Winnebago **or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for Lake Winnebago are reached, OR any of the pre-set Winnebago System-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first** (as per trigger closure rules).

### Upriver Lakes (Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan)

February 8, 2020 through February 23, 2020 on the Upriver Lakes **or until any of the pre-set harvest caps for the Upriver Lakes are reached, OR any of the pre-set Winnebago System-wide harvest caps are reached, whichever comes first** (as per trigger closure rules).

An annual lottery sturgeon spear fishery began on the Upriver Lakes in 2007. Spearers can either apply for an Upriver Lakes sturgeon tag or purchase a preference point (thus not included in the lottery for that season) by August 1. Applicants are notified by October 1 of whether they were successful in receiving authorization to purchase an Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license. Group lottery applications of up to four persons are accepted and the group will carry the preference points of the group member with the fewest points. Spearers not drawn for an Upriver Lakes license receive a preference point and can purchase a Lake Winnebago spearing license. Applicants drawn for an Upriver Lakes permit will lose their accumulated preference points regardless of whether they purchase their tag. Spearers can only buy a license for either Lake Winnebago or the Upriver Lakes, not both. License sales for the Lake Winnebago season ends October 31. The Upriver Lakes sturgeon lottery fishery limits participation to 500 tags in 2020 and will have an allotment of the overall sturgeon harvest caps. Upriver Lakes tags can be transferred to a youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit.



Total harvest of sturgeon will be limited through pre-set harvest caps. Harvest caps for the 2020 Winnebago System spearing season are 430 juvenile females, 950 adult females and 1200 males. Portions of the system-wide harvest caps have been allocated to the fisheries on Lake Winnebago and the Upriver Lakes as shown below:

	Juv. Females	Adult Females	Males
Lake Winnebago	344	855	960
Upriver Lakes	86	95	240
Winnebago System	430	950	1200

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Lake Winnebago harvest caps being reached.

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on the Upriver Lakes before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Upriver Lakes harvest caps being reached.

The Department will close the sturgeon spearing season on all waters of the Winnebago System before the maximum 16 day season when any of the following conditions occur:

- At the end of a spearing day in which 100% of any one of the three Winnebago System-wide harvest caps is reached or exceeded, or
- 24 hours from the end of a spearing day which concludes with a harvest of 90 to 99% of any one of the three Winnebago System-wide harvest caps being reached..

**BAG LIMIT:** One lake sturgeon per licensee

**MINIMUM LENGTH LIMIT:** 36 inches

**SPEARING HOURS:** 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

### **LICENSE REQUIREMENT**

To spear sturgeon, residents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license and tag for \$20.00 and nonresidents must purchase a sturgeon spearing license and tag for \$65.00

Only persons 12 years of age and older are eligible to spear sturgeon. No sturgeon spearing license may be issued or purchased after October 31, 2019 except for: 1) Wisconsin residents that turn 12 between November 1, 2019 and the last day of the 2020 spearing season, or 2) Wisconsin residents serving in the Armed Forces that are home on leave during the 2020 spearing season. **The sturgeon spearing license and tag must be carried by the licensee at all times while fishing for sturgeon with a spear, and no person may use or carry the tag or license of another.** Lake Winnebago licenses are non-transferable, but Upriver Lakes licenses can be transferred to youth (age 12-17) or a person holding a valid Class A, B, C or D disabled permit

### **TAGGING REQUIREMENT**

Upon harvest, the carcass tag must be immediately validated by removing the validation stub of the tag below the dotted line. The validated tag must stay with the sturgeon until presented at a DNR operated registration station. The tag does not need to be attached to the sturgeon unless the license holder leaves the fish. Any harvested sturgeon must be presented by the spearer at a registration station by 2:00 PM of the same day it was speared. Group bagging is not legal and occurs whenever the person who tags the sturgeon is different from the person who speared the fish.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

It is unlawful for any person to transport an unregistered sturgeon in or on any motor driven vehicle unless the sturgeon is openly exposed. ***"Openly exposed" means open to view by a person in a passing vehicle.***

**It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows:** *from the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha, east on highway 114 to highway 55; south on highway 55 to U.S. highway 151; south on U.S. highway 151 to Winnebago drive in Fond du Lac; west on Winnebago drive to Scott street; west on Scott street to highway 45; north on highway 45 to Main street in Oshkosh; north on Main street to Waugoo avenue; east on Waugoo avenue to Bowen street; north on Bowen street to county highway A; north on county highway A to highway 114 in Neenah; east on highway 114 to the intersection of highways 10 and 114 in Menasha.*

**It is illegal to possess an unregistered sturgeon speared from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan outside the highway boundary area delineated as follows:** *from the intersection of highways 45 and 21 in Oshkosh west on highway 21 to highway 116; north on highway 116 to county highway B; west on county highway B to county highway D; west on county highway D to highway 49; north on highway 49 to county highway H; east on county highway H to highway 110; east on highway 110 to county highway II; south on county highway II to county highway M; south on county highway M to highway 116; east on highway 116 to highway 45; south on highway 45 to highway 21.*



Paul Wojahn of Oshkosh registered this 73.6 inch, 117.9 pound lake sturgeon at Wendt's on February 9, 2019.



## REGISTRATION

A person who spears a sturgeon must accompany the fish to an official sturgeon registration station. Phone-in or online harvest registration is **NOT** available for sturgeon registration. To avoid the "end of the day" rush please bring your fish in as soon as possible after spearing it. You must be at the registration station and in-line to register your fish by 2:00 PM the day it was speared.

Any fish harvested from Lake Winnebago must be registered at one of the registration stations on Lake Winnebago. Any fish harvested from Lakes Butte des Morts, Winneconne or Poygan (the Upriver Lakes) must be registered at one of the registration stations on the Upriver Lakes.

## STURGEON REGISTRATION STATIONS

Stations are operated daily throughout the season by DNR Fisheries staff. The registration process allows for collection of important biological information on the size, sex and age of your fish. A metal registration tag will be attached to your fish during the registration process to signify to Law Enforcement staff that your fish has been properly registered. The registration tag must be retained until the carcass is consumed. Some registration stations may be closed prior to the end of the season depending on spearing activity and volume of sturgeon registrations. Any early closures will be posted at registration stations.

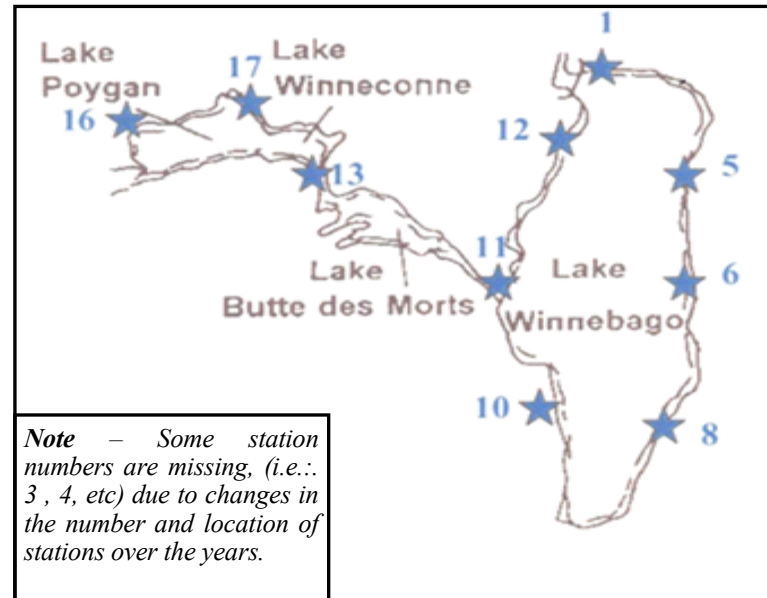
### Winnebago System Sturgeon Registration Stations: Station No. and Location

#### Lake Winnebago

- 1** Waverly Beach Resort  
*N8770 Fire Lane 1, Menasha*
- 5** Stockbridge Harbor Bar  
*1919 W Lake St., Chilton*
- 6** Quinney Quencher  
*W5626 Quinney Rd., Chilton*
- 8** Jim and Linda's Supper Club  
*W3496 county Rd. W, Malone*
- 10** Wendt's on the Lake & Harbor  
*N9699 Lake Shore Dr., Van Dyne*
- 11** Jerry's Tavern  
*1210 Ceape St., Oshkosh*
- 12** Payne's Point Bar and Grill,  
*1557 Payne's Point Rd., Neenah*

#### Upriver Lakes

- 13** Critters Wolf River Sports  
*700 W Main St., Winneconne*
- 16** Indian Point Tavern  
*Cty Trk H 1/2 mi. E of Tustin*
- 17** Boom Bay Bar and Grill  
*884 Cut Off Ln., Larsen*



Lauren Schumacher harvested her first fish (47.3 pounds, 58.6") during the 2019 spearing season. Congratulations Lauren!

## LIGHTS, UNDERWATER CAMERAS, DEPTH LOCATORS

The use of artificial lights as an aid during spearing is prohibited during sturgeon spearing. This prohibition begins 48 hours prior to the season opener and runs the duration of the season. Underwater cameras and other forms of technology may be used, but any lights on the camera must be disabled (turned off, taped over, or non-illuminating).

## POSSESSION AND USE OF A SPEAR

No person may have under his or her control any spear or similar device in any enclosure on the ice or waters of the Winnebago System except when authorized during established sturgeon spearing seasons during open spearing hours. No person may take, capture, kill or attempt to kill sturgeon on the Winnebago System by any means other than spearing with a spear thrown by hand from inside a fishing shelter placed on the ice during the open spearing season.

## ICE HOLE RESTRICTIONS

No person may cut, use, or maintain an ice hole larger than 12 inches in diameter or square for the taking of fish in any manner through the ice except spearing sturgeon on the Winnebago System during the open season. The total area of a sturgeon spearing hole, or combination of holes, may not exceed a total of 48 square feet, measured at the surface of the ice. Ice holes larger than 12 inches cut, used, or maintained for spearing may not be covered by a shelter, shanty, or similar device, except during the period from 48 hours before and continuing through the open sturgeon spearing season.

## ICE HOLE MARKING

Sturgeon spearing ice holes must be marked with at least 2 strips of wood that extend a minimum of 3 feet above the ice. The wood strips must not exceed 1.5 inches in width and .25 inches in thickness (wood lathe meets the requirement). **When you first set your shanty, cut a hole and freeze the lathe into the ice for better marking of sturgeon holes. Lathe markers stuck in snow banks are NOT adequate because the lathe no longer marks holes when warm weather conditions melt snow.**

## SPEARING OF ROUGH FISH

Spearing of any species of fish other than sturgeon from the Winnebago System is prohibited during the sturgeon spearing season.

## FISHING EQUIPMENT OR GEAR

It is unlawful to possess a fishing pole, hook and line angling equipment, or other similar devices that could be used to catch fish in an ice fishing tent, shanty, or ice fishing enclosure with ice holes larger than 12 inches in diameter or square.



## LITTER

It is illegal to place or deposit any materials (including fish, fish parts or other biodegradables) on the ice or lake bed that cannot be retrieved. Any material used in a sturgeon spearing hole must be removed by the sturgeon spearer when the hole is abandoned, or if requested by a warden. Any material that is left on or frozen in the ice or waters is the responsibility of the person who left the material (including tar paper, wood, cardboard or any other litter used adjacent to shanties).

## ICE SHANTIES AND SHELTERS

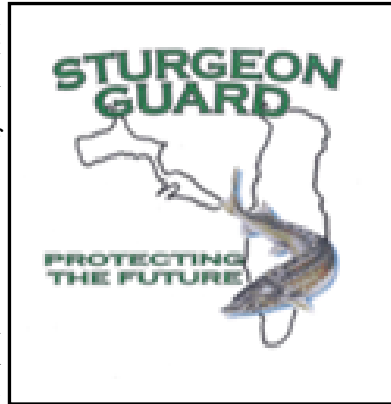
The door of any occupied shanty/shelter shall be such that the door can be readily opened from the outside. All shanties/shelters must have the name and residential address of the person owning or using the shanty. The name and address must be painted or permanently affixed on the outside with a minimum of 1" lettering. All shanties/shelters must be completely removed from the ice (for all inland waters south of Hwy 64) by the first Sunday following March 1.

## GUIDING

No person may engage or be employed for any compensation or reward to guide, direct or assist any other person in sturgeon spearing/fishing unless the person is issued a guide license by the Wisconsin DNR. Guiding includes receiving compensation of any kind, [monetary, gratuity, physical items, etc.], for services rendered. Some examples of guiding would include providing a shanty with the ice hole already cut, placing out bait or decoys, providing/renting equipment, or other activities that assist the angler/spearer to locate, attract and/or harvest fish. Please contact your local Conservation Warden with any questions.

## STURGEON GUARD VOLUNTEERS NEEDED IN SPRING

Each spring dozens of volunteers have an opportunity to educate the public about sturgeon while protecting the fish from poaching and harassment at their spawning sites on the Wolf, Embarrass, and Little Wolf rivers. Sturgeon are very susceptible to illegal harvest and harassment when they are spawning along the river's rocky shorelines. "Sturgeon Guard" volunteers monitor the vulnerable fish throughout the spawning season. The program is coordinated and directed by DNR Law Enforcement staff, and funded by Sturgeon for Tomorrow and sturgeon spearing license fees.



Once spawning begins, pairs of sturgeon guards are assigned to sites where fish are actively spawning. Prior to assignment, guards check in at "Sturgeon Camp," just north of Shiocton, where they partake in a continental breakfast, and receive a generous sack lunch, an identification hat (that they get to keep), and a map that directs them to their site.

Guards also receive educational information about sturgeon and the spawning process, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions. Several spawning sites are on public property and attract large crowds, so guards are encouraged to answer questions and help educate the public about this ancient fish.

At the end of their shift, guards return to camp for a hearty meal before they make their way home.

Guards for 2020 will be scheduled from April 15th through May 1st. Spawning generally occurs over a 5 to 10-day period within that time frame. We do our best to get all scheduled guards out on the riverbank to see fish, although we cancel some scheduled shifts if the fish are simply not active.

More information about the 2020 Sturgeon Guard program is available on the DNR website by searching "Sturgeon Guard." Online registration will begin in early March. Interested volunteers also may register by contacting the DNR call center at 1-888-936-7463 or contacting the Sturgeon Guard coordinator at 920-420-1140.

## STURGEON FOR TOMORROW

In 1977 a group of sturgeon enthusiasts from the Lake Winnebago area founded Sturgeon for Tomorrow to help preserve, protect and enhance the sturgeon resource in the Winnebago System. That group quickly grew into the largest citizen advocacy group for sturgeon in the world, currently made up of five chapters and over 3,000 members. Through tremendous dedication and hard work Sturgeon for Tomorrow (SFT) has raised and donated over \$1 Million for sturgeon research and management activities. SFT has funded a wide variety of projects over the years including the



sturgeon guard program, the Sturgeon History Project, purchase of sampling equipment, spawning and nursery site construction, sturgeon population assessments, sturgeon propagation, and the Upper Fox River sturgeon rehabilitation project. SFT also provided the support necessary to enact several influential harvest regulations and has had directors actively participate in local and statewide sturgeon management advisory committees.

**If you are interested in further information about Sturgeon for Tomorrow or are interested in attending one of their five fund raising banquets held each year, please call:**

<b>Jim Patt</b>	Southwest Chapter President January 11, 2020 in Fond du Lac	<b>920-922-7136</b>
<b>Dan Groeschel</b>	SFT Main Chapter President January 25, 2020 in Kiel	<b>920-923-1077</b>
<b>Dean Schroeder</b>	Northern Chapter Vice President February 1, 2020 in Darboy	<b>920-841-7108</b>
<b>Pat Braasch</b>	West Central Chapter March 21, 2020 in Oshkosh	<b>920-231-4708</b>
<b>Sally Gilson</b>	Upper Lakes Chapter President September 12, 2020 in Winneconne	<b>920-573-6975</b>